Useful links and places:

-Catholic Worker Websites:
www.catholicworker.com
www.catholicworker.org
www.lacatholicworker.org
www.ca.geocities.com/vancouvercatholicworker
www.catholicworker.com/bookstore/index.html

-Radical/Progressive Christianity
www.jesusradicals.org
www.nonviolentjesus.blogspot.com
www.geezmagazine.org
www.catholicanarchy.org
www.anglocatholicsocialism.org
www.tierra-nueva.org
www.romancatholicwomenpriests.com
www.desertwisdom.org/dttw

-Anti-War
www.stopwar.ca
www.ivaw.net
www.serve.com/nukeresister
www.resisters.ca
www.wri-irg.org
www.plowsharesactions.org

-Activism
www.foodnotbombs.net
www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook
www.iww.org
www.deathpenalty.org
www.freegan.info/?page=home
www.justicia4migrantworkers.org

-Other Good Websites:
www.vancouverdiy.com
www.pcac.net/indexn.html *(Palestinian Child Arts Centre)*
www.southcentralfarmers.com
www.commongroundrelief.org
www.teachingforpeace,org
www.jonahhouse.org

THE CHRISTIAN RADICAL

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIANITY AND ANARCHO-PACIFISM



VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 DECEMBER 2006
$0.00 FREE

Last month thanks to Frank Cordaro at the Des Moines Catholic Worker I was able to reprint the Statement from the National Catholic Worker Gathering in last month's issue. I hadn't paid much attention to the Des Moines Worker website before but while poking around on it recently I found this piece written when he was still serving as a parish priest. It's really upsetting to me that this sermon could have been just as easily given this year, it could havebeen printed in 2003 when the new Iraq war was just starting; and if we continue to ignore the truth in these words our children and grand children could very easily be reading this and thinking the same thing, if we don't destroy ourselves first. But there is still hope. The very fact that Franks words exist in living memory and dead cyberspace offer us hope, no matter how awful the world can seem and no matter how hopeless it might feel to you or I reading the news or hearing the rumors of war there is a greater truth, the truth that Christ has overcome the world. The mystery of faith, Christ's Life, Death and Resurrection means the largest battle has already been won for us, what's left for us is a big task to be sure, we are called to be witnesses to the peace that passes all understanding, we are called to bring this peace into the world by how we live our lives. The implications of this can be staggering but in Christ nothing is impossible.
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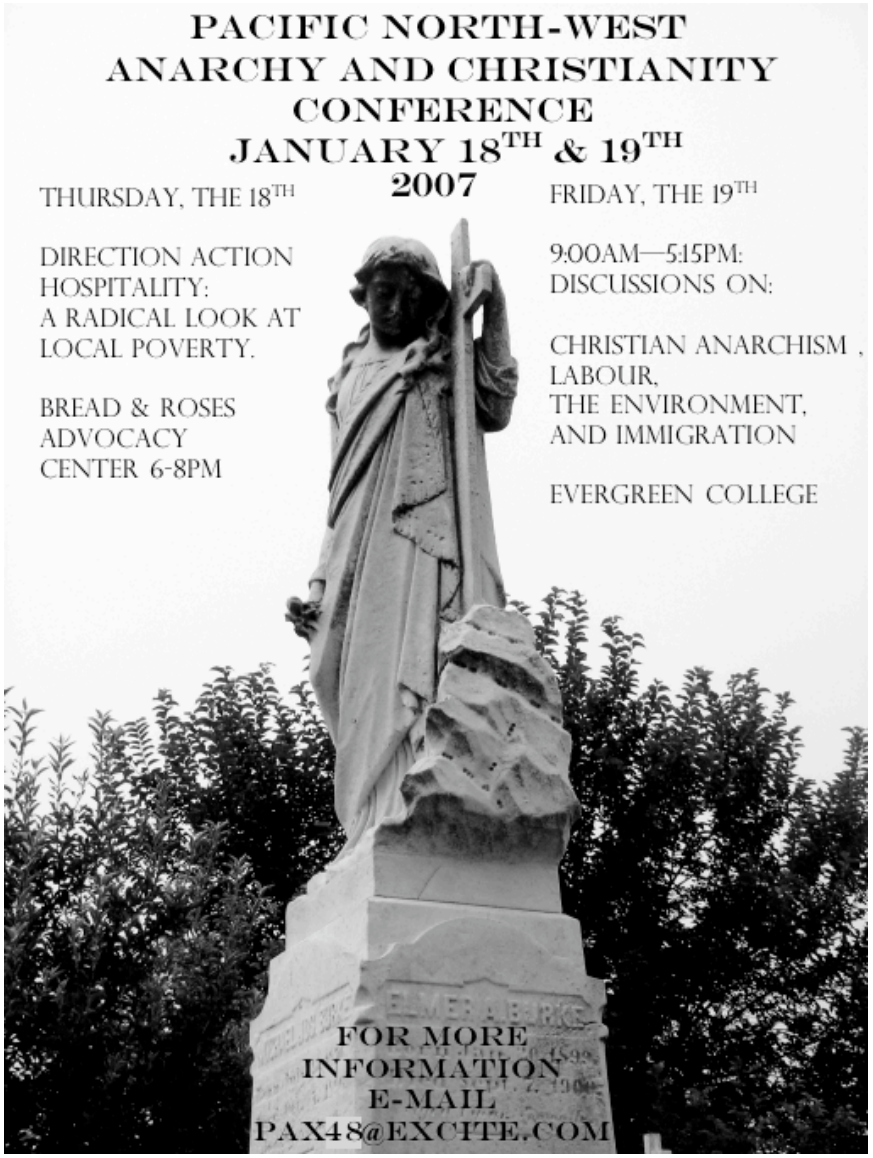


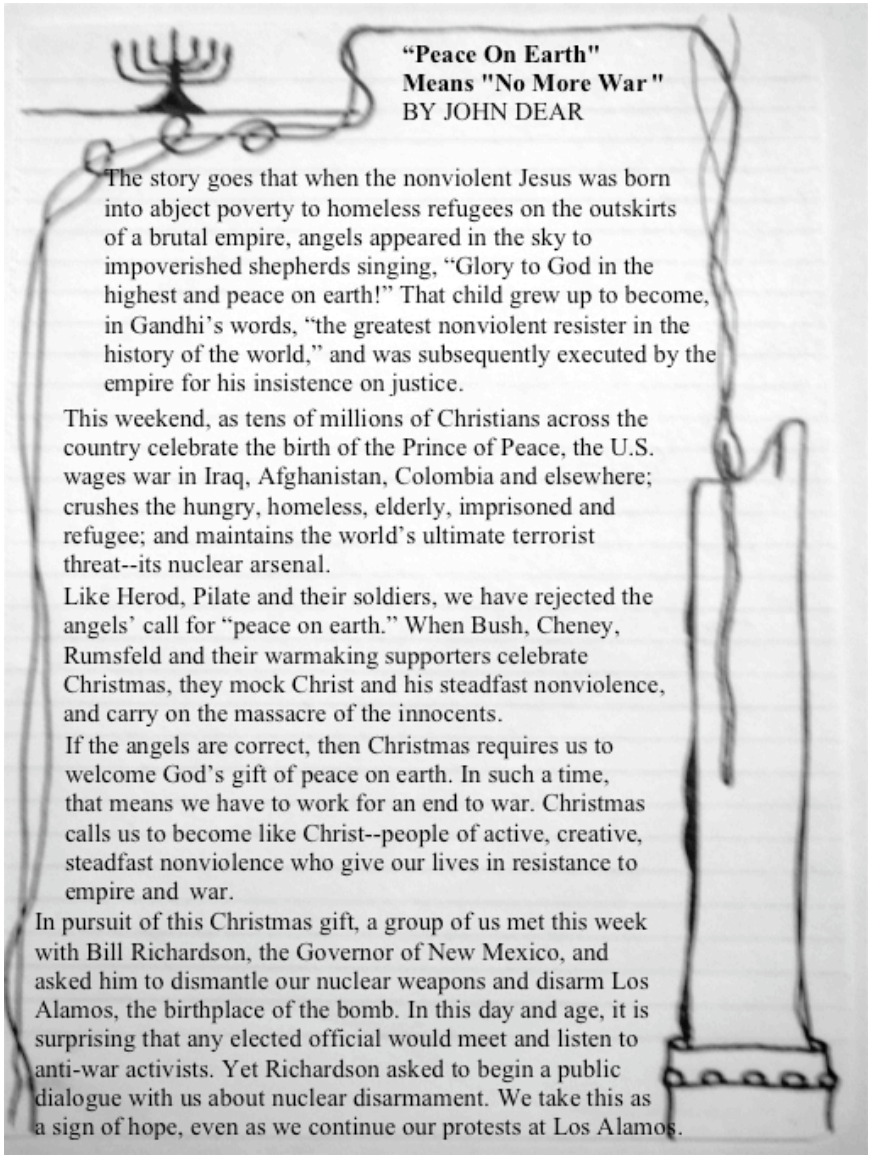
NO ROOM NOW, NO ROOM THEN:

Two thousand years after His birth, we are no more prepared to receive Jesus than we were the first Christmas day. Maybe that is the way it's supposed to be. The world has never been a welcoming place for the birth of Christ. On that first Christmas, according to the Gospel of Luke, except for a few poor shepherds, Jesus' birth was ignored by mainstream society. He was hidden in poverty. In Matthew's account, the public attention of the Star brought Herod's death squads to Bethlehem to slaughter the Innocent. The Star also forced the Holy Family into political exile. Jesus spent His early years as a political refugee in Egypt.



WHERE WOULD JESUS BE BORN TODAY? WHO MIGHT HE BE?:
Perhaps the best way to keep our Christmas ob-servance honest, is to seek out the' Christ Child' in our midst today. Look for Him in the peoples and surroundings in which the original Christ Child was born among the ignored and hidden poor among those who are strangers forced to flee their own homeland. If there is going to be room for the true meaning of Christmas in our hostile world this year, we who are followers of Jesus will need to help create this welcoming space with gestures of love and kindness to those among us who are in need. There's a needy person in every family, in every community and in every corner of our world. When we reach out to them in love and kindness this Christmas Season, we do our little part in creating just enough space for the birth of Christ. <





"Peace On Earth"
Means "No More War"
BY JOHN DEAR

The story goes that when the nonviolent Jesus was born into abject poverty to homeless refugees on the outskirts of a brutal empire, angels appeared in the sky to impoverished shepherds singing, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth!" That child grew up to become, in Gandhi's words, "the greatest nonviolent resister in the history of the world," and was subsequently executed by the empire for his insistence on justice.

This weekend, as tens of millions of Christians across the country celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, the U.S. wages war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia and elsewhere; crushes the hungry, homeless, elderly, imprisoned and refugee; and maintains the world's ultimate terrorist threat--its nuclear arsenal.

Like Herod, Pilate and their soldiers, we have rejected the angels' call for "peace on earth." When Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and their warmaking supporters celebrate Christmas, they mock Christ and his steadfast nonviolence, and carry on the massacre of the innocents.

If the angels are correct, then Christmas requires us to welcome God's gift of peace on earth. In such a time, that means we have to work for an end to war. Christmas calls us to become like Christ--people of active, creative, steadfast nonviolence who give our lives in resistance to empire and war.

In pursuit of this Christmas gift, a group of us met this week with Bill Richardson, the Governor of New Mexico, and asked him to dismantle our nuclear weapons and disarm Los Alamos, the birthplace of the bomb. In this day and age, it is surprising that any elected official would meet and listen to anti-war activists. Yet Richardson asked to begin a public dialogue with us about nuclear disarmament. We take this as a sign of hope, even as we continue our protests at Los Alamos.

When Gandhi was asked one Christmas day for his thoughts about Christmas, he spoke about the connection between the wood of the crib--Christ's poverty--and the wood of the cross--Christ's nonviolent resistance to evil. He said Christmas summons us to the same lifelong nonviolence. It has social, economic, and political implications. I think, like Gandhi, that we have to make those connections and pursue those implications. Here are a few of them.

First, Christmas celebrates the birth of a life of perfect nonviolence and calls us to become people of active nonviolence. Christmas invites us to practice the vulnerable, disarming simplicity of children, to live the disarmed life in solidarity with the children of the world, and to spend our lives in resistance to empire. It summons us to study, teach, practice and experiment with creative nonviolence that we too might live the life of nonviolence which Jesus exemplified so that one day peace might reign one earth.

Second, Christmas demonstrates that God sides with the poor, becomes one with the poor, and walks among the poor. God does not side with the rulers, the rich or the powerful, but with the homeless, the hungry and the refugees. Christmas puts poverty front and center and demands that we work to abolish poverty itself so that every human being has food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, employment and a lifetime of peace.

Third, since Christmas illustrates how God sides with the poor in order to liberate the oppressed from poverty and injustice, it calls us to reject greed, give away our money and possessions to those in need, and also live in solidarity with the disenfranchised.

Fourth, Christmas pushes us to stand on the margins of society, where we will find God. Christmas announces that every human being is a beloved son and daughter of the God of love. Every human life is beautiful in the eyes of God, since God has become one of us. From now on, we reject exclusivity, racism, sexism, and discrimination of any kind, and embrace everyone as equal. We stand on the margins with the excluded, the marginalized, the outsiders and outcasts. From there, we envision a new reconciled humanity.

Fifth, as Gandhi pointed out, there is a straight line from the crib to the cross. Christ practiced steadfast nonviolent resistance to imperial injustice and was brutally executed. That bloody outcome is crucial to the story, and calls us to work for the abolition of the death penalty so that Christ will never be crucified again and the killing stops once and for all.

Sixth, since the birth of Christ means that every human life is beloved by God, that all human beings are God's children, we have to treat every human being on the planet as our very own sister and brother which means we must oppose war and work for the abolition of war itself. In particular, we denounce Bush's war on Iraq, demand that the troops return home, and call for reparations and nonviolent solutions to the horrors we have brought upon the people of the Middle East.

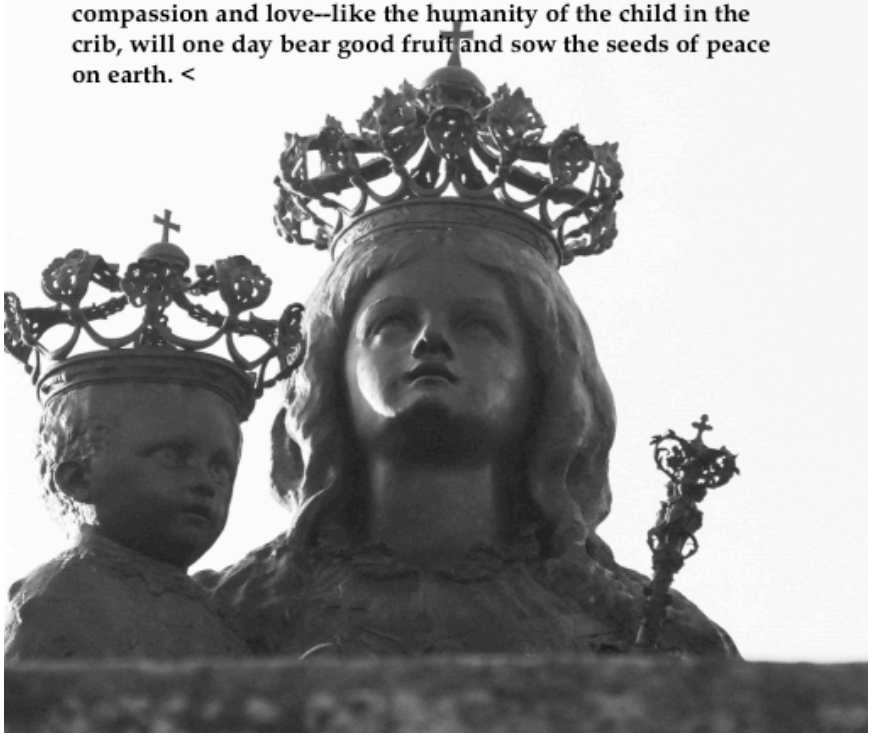


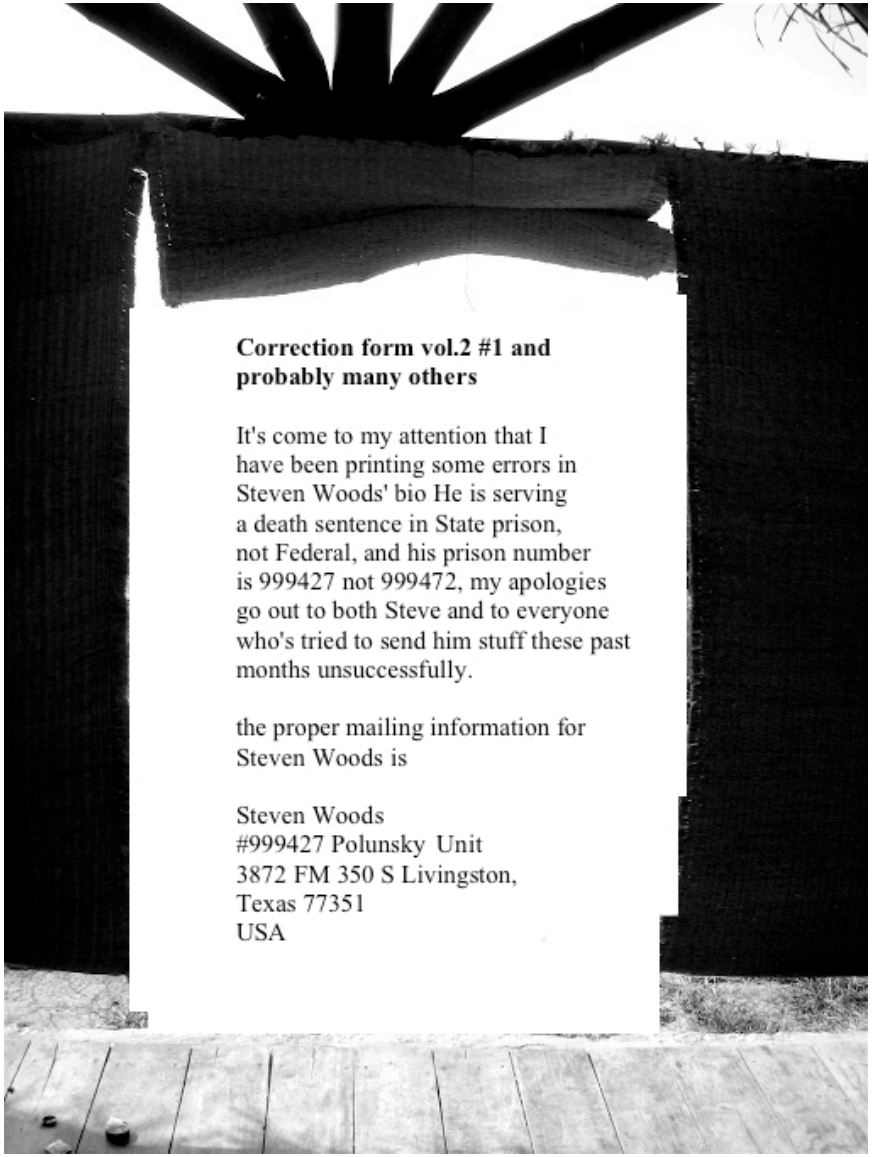
Seventh, if the angels celebrate the coming of "peace on earth," that means they are environmentalists. We too have to protect the earth, oppose its destruction, defend God's creatures and the universe, and help make the earth a place of peace for every life form.

Eighth, Christmas means working for the abolition of nuclear weapons. These weapons are idolatrous and blasphemous. Their very existence insults the God of peace and mocks the nonviolent Jesus. We can't celebrate Christmas and at the same time work at Los Alamos, Livermore Labs, the Nevada Test Site, or the Pentagon, or be silent while this work goes on. We must reject this love or death and destruction, and pursue life, the God of life, and a new world without nuclear weapons.

Ninth, Christmas calls us individually to prepare for the gift of peace on earth. It invites us to welcome peace in our hearts and our personal lives, and learn to be at peace with ourselves, with God, with our families, friends, neighbors, and local communities, and with the whole world.

Finally, Christmas invites us to be human in an inhuman time. The scandal of the story is that God wants to become human and show us how to be human. We, on the other hand, want to play God, to be powerful, in charge, in control, to dominate the world. Perhaps the best way to celebrate Christmas and welcome the beautiful gift of peace on earth is simply to be human, despite the callous inhumanity around us, and to trust that our modest, vulnerable humanity--our nonviolence, compassion and love--like the humanity of the child in the crib, will one day bear good fruit and sow the seeds of peace on earth. <





Who Would Jesus Bomb?
By J. Barrett Lee

I have to admit that it was hard to read the news this week. I saw one report that over 655,000 Iraqis have been killed since the start of the war in 2003. I saw another one saying that more Americans have died in this war than died on September 11, 2001. And then, to top it all off, North Korea tested a nuclear bomb, plunging the world back into an age where we live with the fear of annihilation.

I feel so helpless! As a Christian, how can I hold up my faith in God against the headlines on the New York Times? How can I stand in front of you tonight with the Bible in one hand and the New York Times in the other, and tell you that there is hope?

It's a hard thing to do. But I think there really is hope. I don't think we're all going to hell in a hand-basket. I think there's a gift we've all been given that has the power to change history. But this gift is so simple and so humble, that it's easy to miss. I'm talking about the gift of God's unconditional love.

Jesus talked about this gift in a passage that is often heard, but seldom practiced. "Love your enemies." Let's get honest. We've all heard this line before. We admire Jesus for saying it, but inside we think that it really wouldn't work in reality. So instead, we come up with excuses for why it wouldn't work in one situation or another.

Some people make the distinction between "love" as an action and "love" as a feeling. They say, "Oh, I *love* this person, but I don't *like* him." People usually use this as an excuse when they talk bad about someone in front of another person. But is it loving to talk bad about someone behind their back?

Sometimes people say that this command doesn't count in certain situations, like war. They claim it's okay to hate or kill another person as long as the government told you so. Can you think of one time when Jesus killed another human being? Then why do Christians today go on TV and say that war is God's will? Who would Jesus bomb?

So why does Jesus tell his followers to love their enemies? In verse 45, he says, "So that you may be children of your Father in heaven." To be a child of God means "to act like God." In other words, we should love our enemies because that's what God does. How does God love his enemies? God "makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." God treats his enemies just like his friends. That means that God treats Saddam Hussein just like he treats George W. Bush. God gives to an addict the same honor that he gives to a preacher. These days, I see a lot of bumper stickers that say, "God bless America." But if we take what Jesus is saying seriously, then we should have just as many bumper stickers that say, "God bless Iraq" or "God bless North Korea."

Saying that God loves his enemies is dangerous. It's dangerous because all of a sudden, the dividing lines that we draw between each other are rendered meaningless. Black or white, men or women, gay or straight, rich or poor, Christian or Muslim, Iraqi or American; any wall that we build to keep other people out of our lives is suddenly torn down.

Imagine how Jesus' audience must have heard this! "Wait a minute Jesus, are you saying that God loves the Romans as much as he loves the Jews?" You see, at that time, Israel was an occupied country. It was a territory of the Roman Empire, the biggest superpower of its day, kind of like America. The Jewish people were waiting for a "Messiah", a military leader who would liberate Israel and kick the Romans out! They were expecting Jesus to be like Osama Bin Laden.

So you can imagine the ruling authorities must have felt pretty offended when Jesus told them "love your enemies." In fact, we know how offended they were because they eventually conspired to have Jesus killed. It was their way of saying "No" to Jesus' message of God's unconditional love. You see, the power of the world lies in its ability to hurt, to exclude, and to kill. But the power of God lies in love. And God's love is more powerful than the world's hate. The world said "No" to Jesus and killed him, but God said "Yes" to Jesus and raised him from the dead. All the hate and all the violence in the world couldn't keep Jesus in the grave. They couldn't silence the message of God's love! That's the gift that has the power to change history!

So how do we get in touch with that gift? How do we take the message of God's unconditional love from the pages of the Bible and write it on the pages of history? How do we take a nice idea and turn it into something that has the power to change the world?



Well, I'll tell you how. Tonight, when you go home, or go back to your room, take a long look in the mirror. I mean, really give yourself the up and down. And then look yourself in the eye and say, "God loves you."

That's it. It's really that easy. I told you it was simple, didn't I? The fact of the matter is that you are precious to God. God loves you just the way you are. You may not even believe in God, but he still loves you. Maybe you want to believe, but can't. That's okay. Start by looking at yourself in the mirror and saying, "God loves you." Keep saying it. Repeat it all day long, as often as you think of it. If you keep saying it, you'll believe it eventually. Even if you don't, what harm could it do? Give it a try, see what happens.

Maybe you think you're unworthy of God's love. Maybe you think God can't love you because you're an addict, or a prostitute, or you're gay, or you hurt someone. Let me assure you, none of those things will stop God from loving you. At the risk of sounding redundant, let me drive this point home: there is nothing you can ever do that will make God love you any less.

"So God loves me," you might say, "Big Deal! What does that have to do with the war? How does that give me hope for the future of the world?

Well, here's how: if you can look in the mirror and realize that God loves you unconditionally, then you can look at your neighbor and realize that God loves him or her unconditionally. If God can love your neighbor unconditionally, then God can love a stranger unconditionally. If God loves a stranger unconditionally, then God can love your enemy unconditionally. And if God loves your enemies the same way he loves you, then it's really hard to launch a missile at them, isn't it? So who would Jesus bomb?

You see, it's like a seed. It starts as something small and simple, but quietly and slowly, it grows into something big, like a tree. It starts with you looking in the mirror and telling yourself, "God loves you." But it ends with the world becoming a better place. Sound stupid? Well, let me tell you another story.

There was once a little black boy and his mother walking down the street in racist South Africa. Suddenly, they saw a white man coming their way. Now, it was the law in those days that black people had to get out of the way when white people were coming. But this time, the white man stepped aside and let the boy and his mother pass by.

"Who was that man?" the boy asked his mother.

"That man was an Anglican priest," she replied, "and furthermore he is a man of God."

Years later, that little boy would say, "That was the day I decided I wanted to be an Anglican priest, and furthermore a man of God." That little boy grew up to be Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Christian minister who was instrumental in bringing racial equality and peace to South Africa. And it all began with one unknown priest who made one small gesture of God's love on a street corner in South Africa.

So try our little experiment. What have you got to lose? You might just change your life. Then again, you might just change the world.

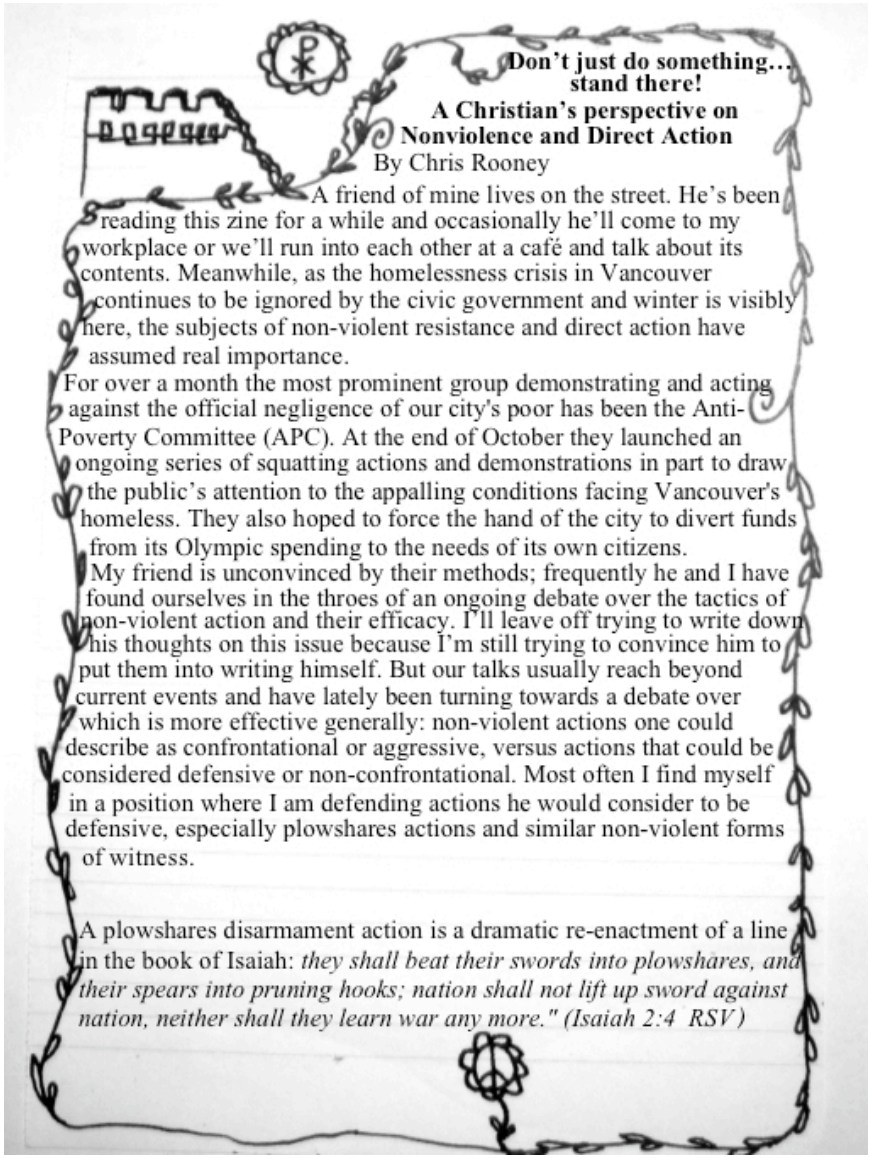
Amen. <

Falling
By Melissa Sillitoe

When did the falling start? I don't know,
but I freefell every day. It lasted years.
I mention it now because I know you know
what it's like to be windbruised,
the jerk of barely catching yourself,
that dizzy stopping without landing.
I fell a long way before I stopped.

Look up. No one else is falling.
The world is no wind tunnel,
but moist grass, bluest sky,
and the people you fell past,
whose eyes you missed,
are not holding still.

Just for now,
see what stays and is real:
trees that hold on,
flowers that push back,
a bee's short hops,
blossom to blossom. <



Don't just do something… stand there!

A Christian's perspective on Nonviolence and Direct Action

By Chris Rooney

A friend of mine lives on the street. He's been reading this zine for a while and occasionally he'll come to my workplace or we'll run into each other at a café and talk about its contents. Meanwhile, as the homelessness crisis in Vancouver continues to be ignored by the civic government and winter is visibly here, the subjects of non-violent resistance and direct action have assumed real importance.

For over a month the most prominent group demonstrating and acting against the official negligence of our city's poor has been the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC). At the end of October they launched an ongoing series of squatting actions and demonstrations in part to draw the public's attention to the appalling conditions facing Vancouver's homeless. They also hoped to force the hand of the city to divert funds from its Olympic spending to the needs of its own citizens.

My friend is unconvinced by their methods; frequently he and I have found ourselves in the throes of an ongoing debate over the tactics of non-violent action and their efficacy. I'll leave off trying to write down his thoughts on this issue because I'm still trying to convince him to put them into writing himself. But our talks usually reach beyond current events and have lately been turning towards a debate over which is more effective generally: non-violent actions one could describe as confrontational or aggressive, versus actions that could be considered defensive or non-confrontational. Most often I find myself in a position where I am defending actions he would consider to be defensive, especially plowshares actions and similar non-violent forms of witness.

A plowshares disarmament action is a dramatic re-enactment of a line in the book of Isaiah: *they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4 RSV)*

The first plowshares action took place on September 9th 1980 at the General Electric plant in King-of-Prussia, PA, where the nose cones for Mark 12A warheads were made. The eight demonstrators, among them three Roman Catholic priests, Frs. Phillip and Daniel Berrigan and Fr. Carl Kabat, broke onto the GE facility with containers of blood and hammers, they poured out the blood on the missile parts and hammered on them, and as they did they waited in the weapons plant praying and singing hymns until they were arrested and brought to trial. In court they chose to represent themselves and they tried as best they could to turn their trial into a place of witness and a place to raise vital questions about nuclear weapons, the immorality of war, and about the arms race, which stole out from the mouths of the poor to feed a lust for weapons systems and brinksmanship. They were all convicted and served their time, many, like Fr. Carl Kabat and the Berrigans went on to more such actions, others inspired by these eight protesters have gone on to stage plowshares actions of their own. By the time Phil Berrigan died in 2002 he had served 11 years in prison for his various acts of non-violent resistance.

Usually when I bring up Christians, pacifism and non-violent resistance to revolutionary friends of mine I will mention this type of action. Often it would seem, and not without reason, that people who aren't well acquainted with Christian peace activism assume that most Christians are passive-resisters, counter revolutionary, or conservative reactionaries. After all, the ones who have the most public clout, the ones most visible, or the most liked by the politicians in America seem to be of this sort. So with Fr. Kabat in the news again for being part of another disarmament action, and my own proclivity for bringing this subject up with people I thought it might be a good time to put down some of my thoughts on what my friend would call the defensive side of non-violent resistance.

He has chosen to use the terms defensive and offensive in our debates though to me it seems more accurately that one form of them is confrontational, while the other sort is non-aggressive. I don't want to put words into his mouth and my intent here isn't to recreate our conversations so from here on I'm going to stop referring to him entirely and focus on trying to make my own point clear.

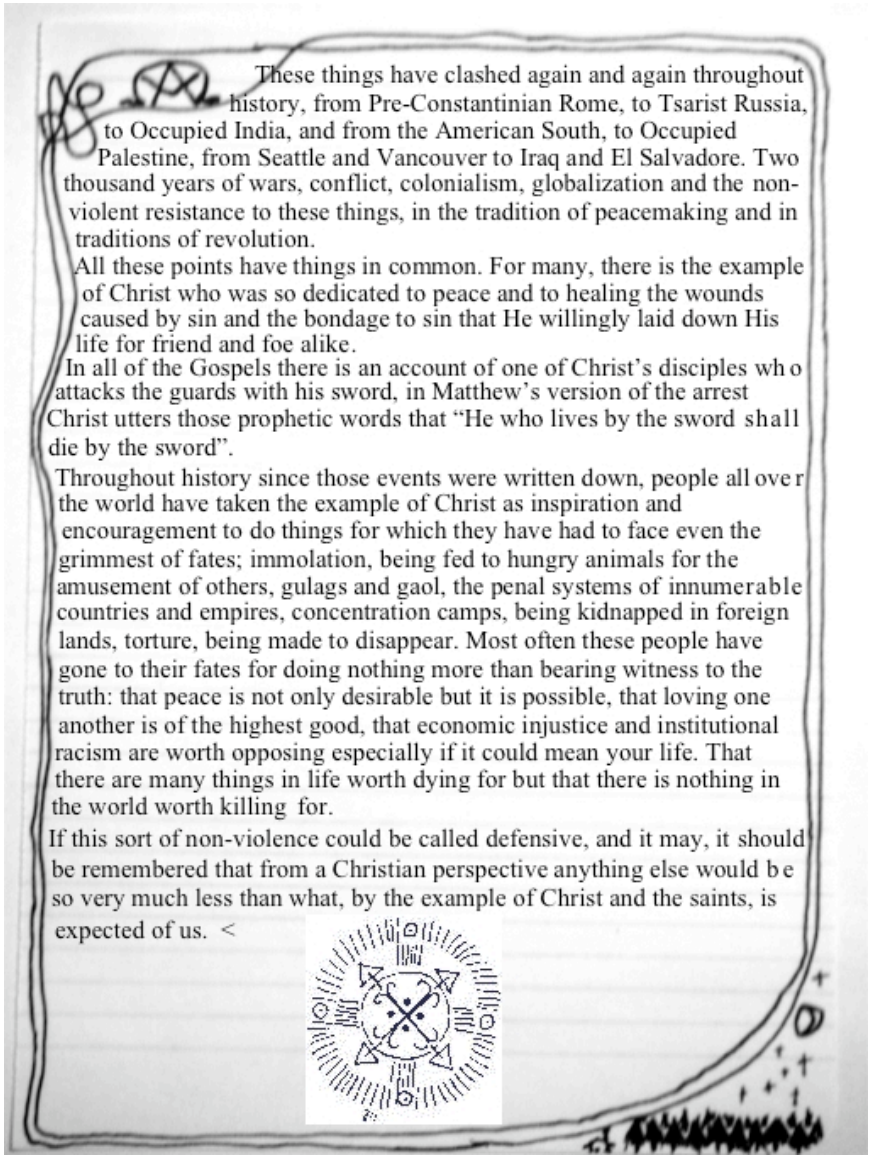
I decided to use a quote by Phil Berrigan as the title of this essay because I think it is a good stepping-off point. To me it would seem that taken from a Christian

perspective any sort of direct action, if it's to have resonance or even comparison with scripture is going to be of a non-aggressive nature. To me that means using non-violence in such a way that one's actions are either breaking an un-just law or upholding a higher law; not because as activists we want to stick-it to someone or to force a violent retaliation (though violent retaliation can be expected regardless). Instead we do these things in an attempt to bring to public attention vital truths and because we are in some way attempting to bear witness to these truths in the hope that our actions will inspire others or provoke honest discussion.

Following the example of plowshares resistance, for the last 26 years people engaged in this type of action have been trying to demonstrate to the world that the tools of war, the implements we would use for our defence, are really the cornerstones of our own destruction and the destruction of all life on this planet. Taken in the larger context their actions are as a dramatized prayer, a prayer for that peace which passes all understanding.

Peace and violence, confrontation and aggression, militancy and belligerence, these are words that clash against one another ceaselessly.

In 1st century Judea, they met constantly. It's easy to forget that as Christ overturned the tables of the money changers, there was also an aggressive series of civil rebellions against the Roman occupiers that continued long after His death and resurrection and lasted until the Romans expelled the Jews from Palestine and destroyed the second temple. When He preached in that temple openly, knowing the authorities meant to kill Him, He spoke not only to rabbis and temple priests but to a city whose people believed He would lead the Israelites to a military victory, expelling the Romans and re-establishing a sovereign Judea, When He healed and befriended the social outcasts to the scorn of respectable Judean society He did it in the company of His friends and apostles; one of them, Simon the Zealot was, by his title, a member of the popular front. And when He assented to be lead away to torture, humiliation, crucifiction and the longest perp-walk in history He did so praying not only for the safety of His friends and family but for the very occupiers, the soldiers pushing His body on to Golgotha and the people who nailed Him up on the cross.



These things have clashed again and again throughout history, from Pre-Constantinian Rome, to Tsarist Russia, to Occupied India, and from the American South, to Occupied Palestine, from Seattle and Vancouver to Iraq and El Salvadore. Two thousand years of wars, conflict, colonialism, globalization and the non-violent resistance to these things, in the tradition of peacemaking and in traditions of revolution.

All these points have things in common. For many, there is the example of Christ who was so dedicated to peace and to healing the wounds caused by sin and the bondage to sin that He willingly laid down His life for friend and foe alike.

In all of the Gospels there is an account of one of Christ's disciples who attacks the guards with his sword, in Matthew's version of the arrest Christ utters those prophetic words that "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword".

Throughout history since those events were written down, people all over the world have taken the example of Christ as inspiration and encouragement to do things for which they have had to face even the grimmest of fates; immolation, being fed to hungry animals for the amusement of others, gulags and gaol, the penal systems of innumerable countries and empires, concentration camps, being kidnapped in foreign lands, torture, being made to disappear. Most often these people have gone to their fates for doing nothing more than bearing witness to the truth: that peace is not only desirable but it is possible, that loving one another is of the highest good, that economic injustice and institutional racism are worth opposing especially if it could mean your life. That there are many things in life worth dying for but that there is nothing in the world worth killing for.

If this sort of non-violence could be called defensive, and it may, it should be remembered that from a Christian perspective anything else would be so very much less than what, by the example of Christ and the saints, is expected of us. <

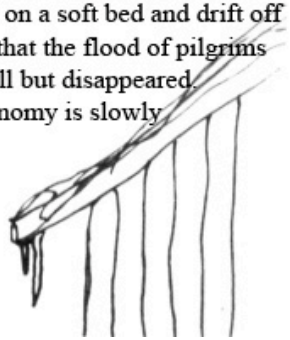
How Still We See Thee Lie

By Joy Ellison

Oh, little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by

If Mary were bedding down in Bethlehem today, I think that she would complain that the city isn't what the song said it would be. I doubt she would find Bethlehem itself particularly little or describe its nights as still. In fact, Mary might find it difficult to get a "deep and dreamless sleep" since life in Bethlehem continues well after nightfall. Perhaps she and Joseph would try to fall asleep amidst the sounds of wedding celebrations, fireworks, World Cup victory parties, and family dinners. But my guess is that Joseph's family would never leave Mary alone. Mary and Joseph would probably be kept up late by relatives insisting on stuffing them with mountains of food and tiny cups of Arabic coffee.

But if Mary and Joseph weren't staying with family, I am certain that they would find plenty of room in whatever inn they might choose. The holy family could have its choice of many lodgings: they could check into the Bethlehem Hotel, a spacious, western-style establishment, or perhaps the Intercontinental, a five-star palace that would put the most spacious stable to shame. Mary could lie down on a soft bed and drift off to a strange sound: silence. Joseph would find that the flood of pilgrims and tourists who once came to Bethlehem has all but disappeared. If Bethlehem lies still today, it's because its economy is slowly dying.



If Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem today, they wouldn't find it to be the thriving, historic, multi-faith community it once was. Bethlehem lies only five miles south of Jerusalem, but at the end of those five miles stands a 25ft high cement wall marking the beginning the West Bank and the Israeli military occupation of Palestine. This wall and occupation form the nightmare that is destroying Bethlehem's economy and disturbing this little town's deep sleep.

Bethlehem suffers quietly under unjust structures imposed by the Israeli military occupation. Bethlehemites face land confiscation, the destruction of their olive groves, home demolitions and movement restrictions which make normal economic development impossible. The wall surrounding Bethlehem prevents goods from entering and leaving, cuts farmers off from their land and even surrounds important religious monuments. It also deters pilgrims from visiting one of the world's oldest Christian communities.

Today pilgrims on their way to the many religious sites in Bethlehem, including Rachel's Tomb, Ruth and Naomi's Field, Shepherd's Field, and of course the Church of the Nativity, must become intimately familiar with the wall. Visitors have to pass through an Israeli military checkpoint. They must wait in line, show their passports, and consent to any searches the Israeli army requires. This ordeal would turn many tourists away, but most give up before getting this close. Potential visitors are deluged with rumors of violence and high prices in Bethlehem. Most organized tours wiz tourists into Bethlehem on buses for a quick stop at the Church of the Nativity and than back to Israel, all in the course of about an hour. Many tours leave Bethlehem out of their itinerary all together.

As a result, thousands of Christians visit the Holy Land each year without seeing the site of Jesus' birth.

Bethlehem's survival would still be in jeopardy if its tourist sector were still thriving. But without the visitors who used to drive Bethlehem's economy, residents have very little hope. The Christian community in Bethlehem is rapidly emigrating, not because of religious discrimination but because of the economic conditions imposed by the Israeli occupation. Not long ago, Christians formed a majority in Bethlehem. If emigration rates remain constant, some say in 20 years Bethlehem will have no Christians left.

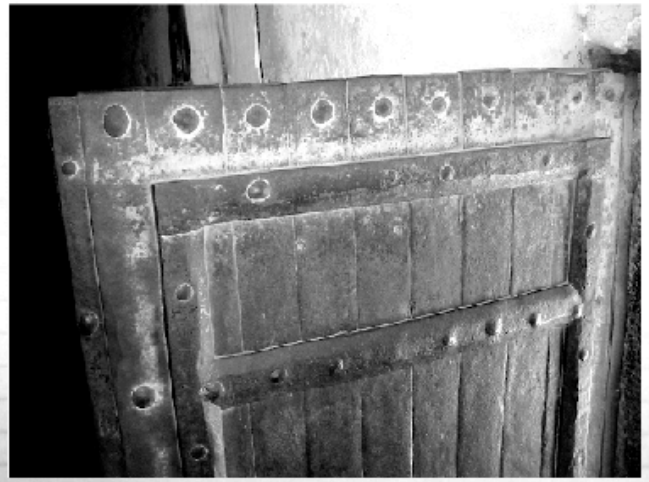
The truth before the world is stark: the location venerated as Christ's birth place is being destroyed. One of the oldest Christian communities is slowly being driven out by a brutal military occupation that strikes at all Palestinians, regardless of faith.

Nothing is safe under occupation, even Jesus' birthplace. In the year 2002, the Israeli army invaded Bethlehem and lay siege to the Church of the Nativity. The church remains riddled with bullet holes today. Even for a person like myself, a Quaker who places no special emphasis on "holy places", these bullet holes are like holes in my heart. I hope that they are holes in a veil through which God's presence can come more readily into our beautiful, mundane world. I want to believe that's what they are, but I worry that they are just another hole in the fabric of Palestinian society.



My only hope is that the broken hearts of Christians and other good people who learn of Bethlehem's plight will be the holes through which God's love can work in our lives. The Christmas story can't end in Bethlehem; it needs to find new life in the hearts of people all over the world who are ready to take action to stop the Israeli military occupation of Palestine.

The prince of peace, a child who grew up to disrupt the status quo with his message of love and justice, was born in Bethlehem. May he be born in our hearts again today.



For more information on the ongoing situation in Bethlehem and ways to take action, visit Open Bethlehem at www.openbethlehem.org <

November 4th - The Strike is Over
by Steve Woods

The strike is over. The 3 of us decided to pack it in for now. Me? I went 82 meals and a bag of cookies, 27 days. I just got done eating my first meal in 27 days.... Rice and beans, peanut butter and jelly. I was also supplied with a couple pastries and candy bars from unnamed sources. . My fellows went 12 days each. We did not win better conditions, but that will still be worked on. Why'd we quit? The three of us knew that we weren't enough to win. We're gonna get healthy again, get a larger group, and get back to it. I'll call the strike a success though. People are now aware of our plight. Death row prisoners have shaken off some of their lethargy. We continue to draw in support from all over the world. We have put the reality of the death penalty in the face of "Joe Citizen".

I'm a bit disappointed in myself. I honestly thought I would make it all the way...I could have, but for what? Yeah, the idea of a hospital stay, costing the state a bunch of money sounds great...But is it worth the cost? Nah, not really. TDCJ were gonna wait 'til my kidneys completely failed before they attempted to forcefeed...I'd lose that much of myself, for what? For nothing. Definately not worth it. I will not be ruled by my pride this time.

I just hope that our hiatus doesn't stop outside support. We need to keep the fight going. I have to commend the Drive movement for their support and their participation in the struggle. And I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart, those who put time and energy into supporting us.

I just hope that our hiatus doesn't stop outside support. We need to keep the fight going. I have to commend the Drive movement for their support and their participation in the struggle. And I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart, those who put time and energy into supporting us. Please continue to do so.



Please continue to do so. We are NOT finished, merely taking a break. There is something I wish to get working on... I'll explain in detail in the coming days... I want to start a campaign directly against the board of criminal justice, if they refuse to fix our situation, it will take a lot of planning, work, and dedication. It's about time we really did something. This hunger strike was a good wake up call. Now that we're awake, let's get to it.

In Struggle & Solidarity,
Steven Woods

Steven Woods is currently serving a death sentence at a state prison in Texas. He has a blog at www.anarchyinchains.com If you would like to write to Steven you can send mail to Steven Woods #999427 Polunsky Unit 3872 FM 350 S Livingston, TX 77351.

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John Dear is a Jesuit priest, peace activist, and the author/editor of 20 books on peace and nonviolence, including most recently "You Will Be My Witnesses" (available from Orbis Books). He lives in New Mexico. For further information, see: www.johndear.org his article is reprinted here with his permission.

Melissa Sillitoe lives in Portland Oregon. She is a member of St. Philip Neri Parish's Peace and Justice Commission and the Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good. She has recently published poems in SINE CERA, NETWORK, and THE WEST VIEW. Her poetry is influenced by her belief in a light that outshines darkness and that all we need to bring about God's Kingdom on earth is right here.

Frank Cordaro lives in the Des Moines Catholic Worker as a member and founder. From 1985, to Aug of 2004, he served as a parish priest in rural Iowa. He resigned from active priestly ministry in Aug of 2004. He has served over 4 1⁄2 years of jail and prison time for his acts of civil disobedience including a Plowshares action in May of 1998. Frank works full time for peace and justice and is preparing a collection of his writings and sermons from the last 25 years. You can read his writings at www.desmoinescatholicworker.org

Joy Ellison is a Catholic Worker and nonviolence trainer living in Portland, Oregon. She has spent a total of 5 and a half month in the West Bank, including three in Bethlehem. She plans to join Christian Peacemaker Teams in January 2007 as a full time member of the Palestine Team. She can be contacted at her blog http://inpalestine.blogspot.com

